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# How to Integrate Health and Wellness Goals into a Continuous Improvement Work Plan

A Toolkit for Schools

**HEALTHY SCHOOLS  
CAMPAIGN**

[healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://healthyschoolscampaign.org)

## Introduction

The link between health and learning is clear: Healthy, active and well-nourished children are more likely to attend school, be ready to learn and stay engaged in class. Schools play an important role in supporting student health and wellness. Improving access to healthy foods and physical activities in particular can positively influence the health of students and improve academic achievement.

The Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) sets up the priorities, goals and action plan for a school. Including health and wellness in this plan is one of the most effective ways to ensure a school is meeting the health and wellness needs of its students and to further current initiatives. This toolkit outlines how health and wellness support learning, strategies for integrating health and wellness into a school's CIWP and additional resources for more information.

This toolkit lays out a simple framework to assist schools in incorporating health and wellness into their school improvement plans—and ensure all students have the opportunity to be the best learners they can be.

## How a Healthy School Environment Supports Learning

A healthy school environment is an important foundation for learning and academic success. The district has supported this with strong policies that promote health and wellness, but there are also specific strategies and practices a school can implement to give its students the healthiest foundation.

### HEALTHY BREAKFAST AND LUNCH

A vast body of research shows that improved nutrition in schools can lead to increased focus and attention, improved test scores and better classroom behavior. Very simply, healthy, well-nourished students are more likely to attend school and to be engaged and ready to learn. Providing students with healthy school meals, including breakfast and lunch, is also a key strategy for student learning and improving student attendance. For example, research shows that universal

breakfast programs are directly associated with reduced absenteeism for students, specifically low-income students of color.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Research shows that physically active students are more likely to attend school, are better able to focus in class and ultimately perform better academically. Physical activity increases brain function, reduces disciplinary problems and increases test scores. School-based physical activity programs have also been shown to improve attendance by increasing school connectedness and by favorably affecting the health status of children with asthma. Ensuring students have the opportunity to be physically active for 60 minutes a day is a key strategy for supporting student attendance and learning.

### SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

School health services, including those delivered by school nurses, school-based health centers and partners, are key for ensuring students have access to the care they need to manage the health conditions that result in missed school, including asthma, diabetes, ADHD, dental and vision problems and obesity. Providing students with access to school health services is a proven strategy for increasing student attendance. Dental health, which sometimes is overlooked, is especially worth noting as a key area for focus in school health efforts aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism. Successful school-based programs treating dental health include school-based sealant programs and mobile dental clinics.

### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

With strong family engagement, schools, together with parents, can help students achieve academically while being fueled by healthy habits that will last a lifetime. Studies have shown that students who have parents engaged in their school lives are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, better student behavior and enhanced social skills. In addition, students who have parents engaged in their school lives are less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, become pregnant, be physically inactive or be emotionally distressed.

Specifically, Title 1 schools must draft the Parent Compact and Parental Involvement Policy, which is a description of how parents will be specifically involved with their children’s education and school, and is reviewed and approved by Parent Advisory Council (PAC). Schools can include goals around organizing a parent-led wellness team, hosting parent workshops, health fairs and school health services enrollment events and more—all with the intent to helping families/parents be more involved with their children’s education and school and helping them learn and understand how nutrition and physical activity affect their child’s health and success in school.

### **HEALTH AND NUTRITION EDUCATION**

Providing students with health and nutrition education helps them learn skills they’ll need to make healthy choices for the rest of their lives. Successful health education can motivate students to improve and maintain their own health, prevent disease and reduce risky behaviors. Successful nutrition education can increase fruit and vegetable consumption, foster positive attitudes about fruits and vegetables and set children up for making healthy food choices. Nutrition behaviors such as eating breakfast impact learning outcomes. Other behaviors, such as not eating enough fruits and vegetables is associated with lower grades among students. By focusing on the link between good nutrition and improved success in the classroom, schools can strengthen their argument for wellness initiatives.

### **Strategies for Integrating Health and Wellness into a Continuous Improvement Work Plan**

A school’s CIWP presents a tremendous opportunity to support the learning and health of its students. We’ve developed four simple strategies to help schools successfully incorporate health and wellness into their CIWPs.

1. Build an Inclusive Team
2. Include Health and Wellness Data
3. Keep Root Causes in Mind
4. Find What Works

### **BUILD AN INCLUSIVE TEAM**

#### **Take a look at the school improvement team. Who is at the table? Who isn’t but needs to be?**

A CIWP team consists of 6-15 committed stakeholders that act as a steering committee for the entire planning process. The principal should serve as the chairperson of the CIWP Team, appointing other team members from the school and community. Other members can include members from the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), the Local School Council (LSC) and community members—including parents. Parents provide a unique and important perspective to the school improvement planning process and can help get other community members on board with the plan.

While the CIWP team needs to remain small, it should include people with a variety of perspectives. Involving a variety of stakeholders will help to ensure that the School Effectiveness Framework is representative of the school community’s perception of areas of strength and areas that need improvement.

Schools can use the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model, which calls for a collaborative approach to learning and health, across the community, across the school and across sectors to meet the needs and reach the potential of each child. It places onus on all who are part of the school to see themselves as responsible for both learning and health and diagrammatically highlights the relationship between the sectors.

### **INCLUDE HEALTH AND WELLNESS DATA**

Include data in the school improvement planning assessment process to ensure a more complete picture of students’ needs.

Key sources of data can shed light on the issues affecting students and their health and put these issues in a larger context. Using data can both inform the planning process and support the plan throughout its implementation.

Here are some metrics and sources to consider:

#### **Childhood Obesity**

According to the “Overweight and Obesity among

Chicago Public Schools Students, 2010-11” report from the Chicago Department of Public Health, 48.6 percent of CPS sixth-graders are overweight or obese. The report also identifies child overweight and obesity rates by neighborhood or community area. In low-income neighborhoods with a majority of residents of color, rates of overweight and obesity can be even higher. Rates of overweight and obesity ranged from 26 percent in Lincoln Park (a predominantly Caucasian community) to 45 percent in Oakland (a predominantly African-American community) to 52.3 percent in South Lawndale/Little Village (a predominantly Latino community).

### **Chicago Public Schools Dashboard**

Dashboard, CPS’ district wide analytical tool, allows schools to filter different types of health and wellness data by various subpopulations, including network, school, grade, gender and more. School administrators can login into Dashboard through CPS’ IMPACT homepage. Once logged in, schools can access data about the number of students who have had their physicals and immunizations; filter attendance data by chronic health conditions; determine which students need vision, hearing and dental exams; and which students need follow-up care or services. Schools can review information about students with chronic conditions to determine if there are large numbers of students needing additional supports. Schools can also assess staff professional development to determine if staff have been properly trained in sexual health education and asthma, diabetes and allergy management.

### **Child Opportunity Index**

The Child Opportunity Index, the measure used by the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), measures a child’s opportunity in the context of neighborhood-based opportunities that influence children’s health and development. CDPH uses this metric in its Healthy Chicago 2.0 agenda, which commits to reducing inequities related to obesity and related illnesses, recognizing that this is central to achieving equity in education and health. Children in low and very low opportunity areas are less likely to have access to

resources, such as healthy food, parks and healthcare, that have a positive impact on health and development.

### **Chronic Absenteeism**

Chronic absenteeism—or missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason, excused or unexcused—detracts from learning and is a proven early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout. Research clearly shows that health issues are a primary cause of chronic absenteeism across communities and across the nation. Understanding and addressing the health-related factors surrounding chronic absenteeism is a proven strategy for supporting attendance and learning. It is important to note that a school can have a chronic absenteeism problem despite high average daily attendance. Aggregate data do not reveal whether more students are missing a few days or whether a small but significant minority of students experience excessive absences. Schools can track individual student absences to better identify students that are at risk of becoming chronically absent.

### **Healthy CPS**

Every May, CPS distributes the Healthy CPS Survey. This survey captures how well a school is implementing a set of district policies that promote student health and results are reported to the public through a metric called the Healthy CPS Indicator that appears on the School Progress Report. Schools receive a Healthy CPS Alignment Report that summarizes its Healthy CPS Survey results in more detail. These results can help a school identify its strengths and weaknesses and use that knowledge to better develop its CIWP.

### **KEEP ROOT CAUSES IN MIND**

When analyzing data, identifying trends and prioritizing challenges, work to identify the root causes.

A root cause analysis is a method of problem solving that looks to identify the foundational cause of an issue. In order to identify root causes of health and wellness issues, and develop solutions, data related to those issues has to be included in the assessment phase of planning. More comprehensive information helps to draw a broader picture, and can help CIWP teams to consider

the potential underlying causes that may be impacting student outcomes.

For example, let's say a data analysis identifies a population of students that are chronically absent. A root cause analysis would look to identify the reason those students are absent in order to eliminate the cause—and ensure those students are able to attend school.

### **FIND WHAT WORKS**

Each school is different and there is no one size fits all model, but every school can integrate health and wellness goals into their CIWPs.

A healthy school environment includes regular access to school health services (including physical, mental, dental, vision and behavioral services), healthy school food, physical activity and a supportive school climate and culture that engages students and their families. Every school is different, and each school's CIWP will incorporate different health and wellness goals. Regardless of a school's specific health and wellness goals there are two ways to include student health in wellness into a CIWP.

#### **Option 1: Include student health and wellness as a standalone strategy.**

Create a CIWP strategy that explicitly addresses health and wellness, with the "expected goal" of improving access to physical activity, nutritious foods, school-based health services, health education, behavioral health, school climate or supports for students with chronic conditions.

#### **Option 2: Incorporate goals related to student health and wellness in support of larger strategies.**

A school can create a CIWP strategy that integrates student health and wellness into a larger strategy, including increasing attendance and increasing family and community engagement. Make sure to tag these identified strategies as student health and wellness. Attendance impacts all facets of a student's school experience and research clearly shows that health issues are a primary cause of chronic absenteeism. In developing an effective CIWP, supporting student health

is a critical step to addressing chronic absenteeism and a key opportunity to make a profound positive impact on children's lifelong learning and health. The family and community engagement strategy might include organizing a parent-led wellness team, hosting parent workshops, health fairs and school health services enrollment events and more—all with the intent to helping families/parents be more involved with their children's education and school and helping them learn and understand how nutrition and physical activity affect their child's health and success in school.

Below are a few examples of health goals that school administrators and staff can include in their school improvement plans:

- We will offer daily physical education, which will lead to more attentive students and less behavioral issues. This will ultimately result in increased academic success.
- We will incorporate comprehensive health education, which will allow students to make healthier decisions around food, physical activity, sexual health, and chronic disease management. This will result in increased attendance, attention and academic success.
- We will provide parenting support by helping parents learn and understand how nutrition and physical activity affect their child's health and success in school. This will lead to more families getting involved in improving nutrition and physical activity opportunities at school and at home, as well as supporting the implementation of CPS school wellness policies. This will ultimately result in helping students be better prepared to learn.
- We will host school health and wellness fairs that provide opportunities for families to enroll their students to receive school health services and Medicaid services and learn about the impact of nutrition and physical activity on a student's ability to learn. This will lead to more students receiving school health services and parents being better able to model healthy behavior and improve conditions for student learning. This will ultimately result in better diagnosis

and management of student health conditions and adoption of healthy behaviors.

· We will include parents in the decision-making process by encouraging them to participate in wellness teams. This will lead to parents being resources in identifying school wellness and safety priorities, being the face of health and wellness initiatives in the school and helping to spread health and safety messages. This will ultimately result in greater family buy-in for a healthy school culture and improve the conditions for student learning.

## **Additional Resources**

Here are a few resources to access for more information about integrating health and wellness into your school's improvement plan.

### **CIWP + STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS GUIDANCE**

The Office of Student Health and Wellness has created a guidance document designed to support schools to include student health and wellness practices as CIWP strategies.

<http://ow.ly/aCzS30gqzJd>

### **WELLNESS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKITS AND GUIDANCE**

CPS has a host of resources available on the Office of Student Health and Wellness website.

[cps.edu/oshw/Pages/HealthyCPS.aspx](http://cps.edu/oshw/Pages/HealthyCPS.aspx)

### **STATE ESSA PLANS TO SUPPORT STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION**

This document created by Healthy Schools Campaign includes downloadable guides and informative webinars on the overall framework, as well as spotlights on specific issues such as chronic absenteeism, nutrition and physical activity, and mental health and wellness.

[healthyschoolscampaign.org/state-essa-framework](http://healthyschoolscampaign.org/state-essa-framework)